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Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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---------- 114225
R 140910Z NOV 74
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1524
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 4585

8. ANOTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THAT LEE HAS BEEN SIMMERING FOR MONTHS OVER THE BOOKS BY BUCHANAN AND GEORGE AS WELL AS THE RECENT SPATE OF CARPING CRITICISM FROM THE FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW AND VARIOUS WESTERN PUBLICATIONS AND IS CONCERNED THAT THESE CRITICISMS HAVE BEEN ECHOED BY SOME OPPOSITION OF ELEMENTS IN SINGAPORE. THEREFORE, HE DIRECTED RAJA TO MAKE A FULL-SCALE REBUTTAL. ALTHOUGH LEE AND SOME OF HIS MINISTERS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY VERY SENSITIVE TO SUCH CRITICISMS, THEY MUST RECOGNIZE THAT ONLY A SMALL GROUP OF PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE AND STUDENTS ARE AWARE OF THEM. CERTAINLY, THE INTEREST AROUSED BY GEORGE'S BOOK ON LEE KUAN YEW HAS LARGELY PASSED. IN FACT, SOME OBSERVERS HAVE EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT RAJA WOULD RISK STIMULATING RENEWED INTREST IN THESE BOOKS MERELY FOR THE SAKE OF DENOUNCING THEM. CONSEQUENTLY, THE EMBASSY DOUBTS WHETHER THIS FULLY EXPLAINS THE MOTIVATION BEHIND RAJA'S SPEECH, AND IT CERTAINLY DOES NOT ACCOUNT FOR HIS CONCERN ABOUT SHADOWY GROUPS QUESTIONING THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF SINGAPORE.

9. A SOMEWHAT MORE PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THAT LEE AND RAJARTNAM ARE WORRIED THAT CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PAP MAY BE SECRETLY ADVOCATING REESTABLISHING CLOSER ECONOMIC LINKS WITH MALAYSIA AS A MEANS OF CUSHIONING SINGAPORE AGAINST A SERIOUS ECONOMIC DECLINE. DR. GOH WAS RUMORED TO HAVE ADVOCATED SUCH A POSITION FOLLOWING THE ARAB OIL EMBARGE A YEAR
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AGO, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT LEE HAS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ALTHOUGH HE PUBLICLY REJECTED REMERGER LAST AUGUST HE MAY STILL FAVOR REESTABLISHING CLOSER ECONOMIC TIES WITH MALAYSIA. WHETHER OR NOT DR GOH IS INVOLVED, LEE MIGHT HAVE BECOME CON-

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CERNED THAT ELEMENTS IN THE PARTY OR GOVERNMENT WERE EITHER MOVING OR MIGHT MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION AND REQUESTED RAJA ON HIS RETURN TO SINGAPORE TO MAKE A SPEECH OSTENSIBLY ATTACKING GROUPS QUESTIONING THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF SINGAPORE, BUT ACTUALLY AIMED AT SILENCING OR HEADING OFF ANY SUPPORT WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT FOR CLOSER ECONOMIC COLLABORATION WITH MALAYSIA. ALTHOUGH THIS HYPOTHESIS PROVIDES A MORE SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION OF THE TONE AND CONTENT OF THE SPEECH, THE EMBASSY HAS ABSOLUTELY NO HARD EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT IT.

10. PERHAPS THE MOST PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THAT LEE MAY BE DEEPLY WORRIED THAT ADVERSE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE COMING YEAR COULD PRECIPITATE A REALLY SERIOUS E-CONOMIC DECLINE AND THAT THIS COULD PROMPT SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS IN THIS CITY STATE TO CONCLUDE THAT SINGAPORE IS NOT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE AND TO PRESS FOR MUCH CLOSER ECONOMIC COO-PERATION OR EVEN REMERGER WITH MALAYSIA. LEE WOULD BE THE FIRST TO SEE THAT IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES SINGAPORE WOULD BE IN A POOR BARGAINING POSITION AND HAVE TO TAKE WHATEVER TERMS MALAYSIA MIGHT OFFER. IF THIS HYPOTHESIS IS CORRECT, RAJARATNAM'S SPEECH WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED AS A WARNING TO EVERYONE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ANY SUCH SOLUTION.

11. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY BELIEVES EXPLANATION ADVANCED PARA 10 IS THE MOST LIKELY, GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT/PAP'S ALMOST TOTAL DOM-INATION OF THE POLITICAL SCENE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT RAJARATNAM WOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE SO CONCERNED OVER THE EXISTENCE OF GROUPS QUESTIONING THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF SINGAPORE UNLESS LEE HARBORED STRONG SUSPICIONS THAT SUCH ELEMENTS EITHER ALREADY EXISTED OR COULD EMERGE BOTH WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND HIS PARTY.
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